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managing public lands for multiple use

Issue 18 July 1989

Inside: *Touring goldrush country*

u.s. department of the interior • bureau of land management

Alaska Fire Service

Fifty Years of Fighting Wildfire In Alaska

Anniversary celebration spotlights advances

Smokejumper Bob Quillen gets ready for the practice jump

A pumper truck and crew from the 1950's attacks a roadside fire

On a sunny Saturday this spring more than 600 people gathered at Fort Wainwright in Fairbanks to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Fire Service and the 30th anniversary of smokejumping in Alaska.

Onlookers clapped as each of the eight smokejumpers landed on the grassy strip between the runway and the taxiway. Fascinated audiences watched as smokejumpers in the parachute loft showed how they pack a parachute. History buffs studied the lobby display of historic documents.

Children especially loved the demonstration of fire suppression foam, squirted from a truck by State of Alaska employees. One boy, after playing in the soapy foam on the grass, was sent by his mother to wash up, and left a trail of white suds as he walked dejectedly to the restrooms.

The Alaskan Fire Control Service was formed in 1939 as part of the General Land Office, which later became part of the Bureau of Land Management. The mission of the Fire Control Service was to fight fires on approximately 250 million acres of fire-prone public land. In the early days, fire patrolmen followed the trains on the Alaska Railroad, beating out fires caused by sparks flying from the smokestacks.

The worst fire year ever recorded was 1957, when 391 fires burned nearly five million acres. In the 1960's BLM firefighters began making fire detection flights after lightning stormed, and a decade later an automated lightning-strike detection system was developed.

The system was tested in Alaska, and by 1978 it had been adopted in all 11 western states.

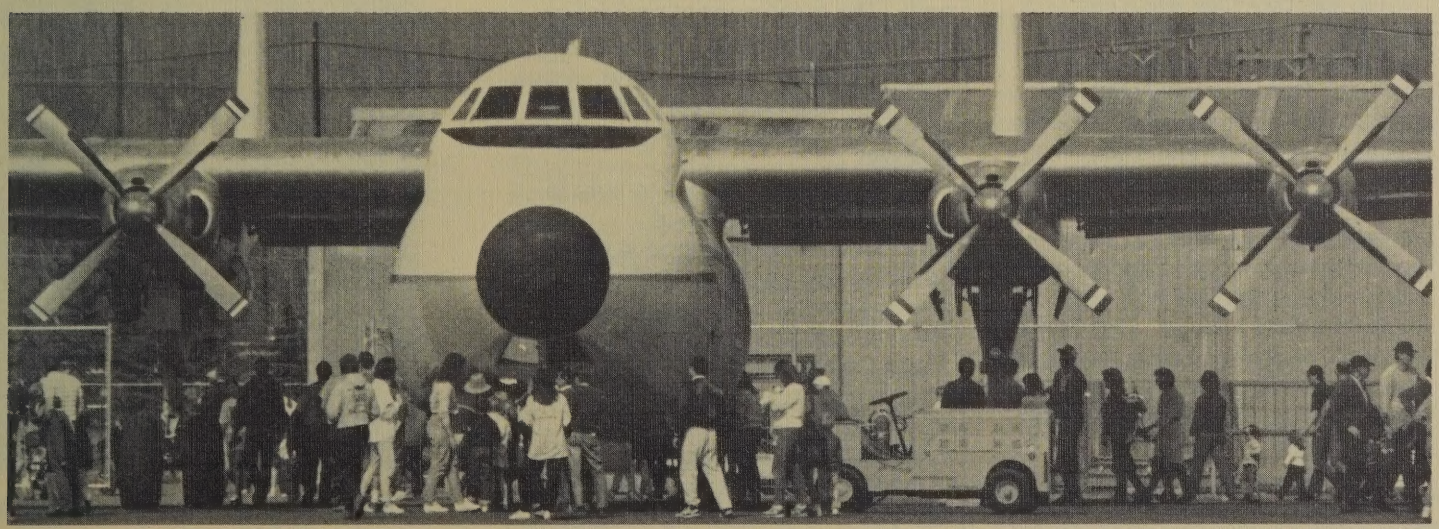
In 1976 the state began assuming responsibility for fire protection on lands in the southern half of the state, completing the process in 1985. BLM continues to fight fires in the northern half of the state.

In the 1980's federal and state land managers cooperated to produce interagency plans that prioritized suppression efforts for different lands.

Since 1939 the fire service has grown from a permanent staff of six with a budget of $37,500 to a staff of more then 300, with a pre-suppression budget of almost $12 million.

Fire fighting continues to evolve each year, adopting new technologies and adapting to new circumstances. But despite all the computers and other technological wonders, most fires are still put out by men and women with spruce boughs and hand tools.

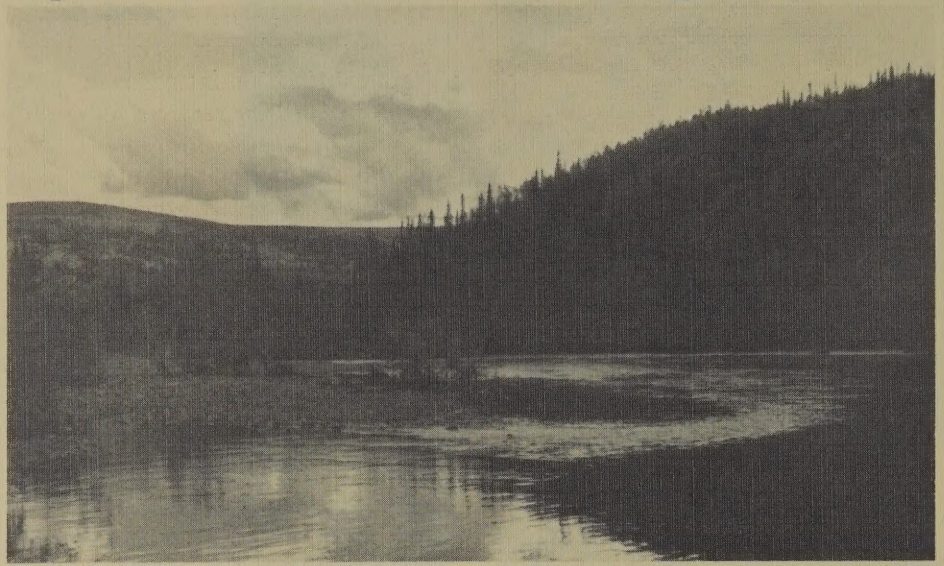
—SM



The Argosy airplane is used to drop heavy cargo by parachute to firefighters on the ground.

What a time trip

By motorhome into the gold rush



An afternoon float trip on the Mosquito Fork near Chicken provides other interesting views of the Fortymile Country.

When Verna leaned back against the vinyl seat, she felt sweat trickling down her back. Finally she said it out loud: "Who would have thought it would get this hot in Alaska?"

It was 85 degrees under clear skies. The two-lane gravel road demanded Ken's full attention as he drove up, down and around the hills of the Fortymile country, so he just nodded.

Ken and Verna Brown from Washington were typical of many visitors who drive to Alaska—they had plenty of time and, like the turtle, carried their house with them.

On this day they were just entering Alaska on the Top of the World Highway from Dawson City, Canada. They were enjoying the spectacular vistas of miles and miles of hilltops and mountaintops, stretching as far as they could see.

For the next hundred miles they followed this road and the Taylor Highway, twisting between barren hilltops above treeline and lush, deeply cut river valleys. The Top of the World Highway meets the Taylor Highway at the community of Boundary, just across the Canada-Alaska border.

The Browns were also following the footsteps of gold miners who crossed this rugged country around 1900 with pack horses and mules, isolated for months at a time while they searched for gold in the streams.

As an amateur gold panner, Ken enjoyed watching the activity on modern placer gold claims in some places and inspecting the relics of gold rush days in other places. Verna later commented, "We learned a lot. The rocks are so different from back home, I wish we knew more about geology."

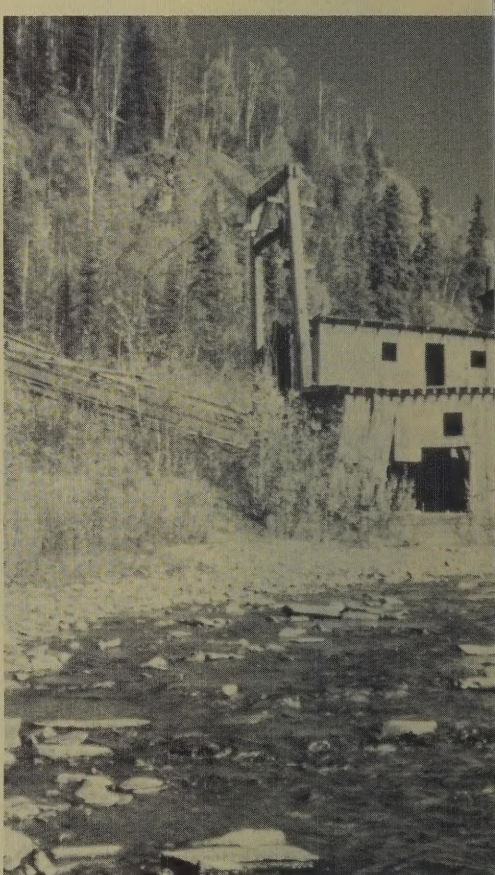
Fortymile country covers more than three million acres and contains a few tiny settlements, far fewer than existed during the gold rush. The three current population centers are Boundary, Chicken and Eagle. When Ken and Verna reached Jack Wade Junction, they decided to continue west toward Chicken.

Their favorite places to stop in Fortymile country were at abandoned townsites and at the massive dredges that combed the river valleys 20 to 50 years ago. The road passes through Jack Wade Camp, named after a prospector who discovered gold here in 1895. This prime gold mining country of the past is still one of the richest producers of gold in the upper Yukon drainage.

A massive gold dredge is parked beside the road at mile 86. This privately owned dredge is a main attraction, the subject of thousands of tourist photos every summer. It was one of the first bucketline dredges used in the area and it worked the longest, until World War II, when operating expenses rose and gold prices dropped. In its heyday the 85-foot dredge moved up and down the valleys, scooping in gravel at one end and spewing it out behind, leaving tailing piles six to 12 feet high like corn rows, up and down the valleys.

From here the couple headed for Chicken. This is a major settlement on the Taylor Highway—if you consider a year-round population of 22 people to be major. In the summer about 200 people live in the area, and the town sports two businesses selling general supplies and gas.

The area around the Chicken Creek bridge is the richest mining ground in the Chicken Creek drainage. It was worked by the largest dredge in the Fortymile. The



The old Butte Creek Dredge at Jack Wade worth only $35 an ounce.

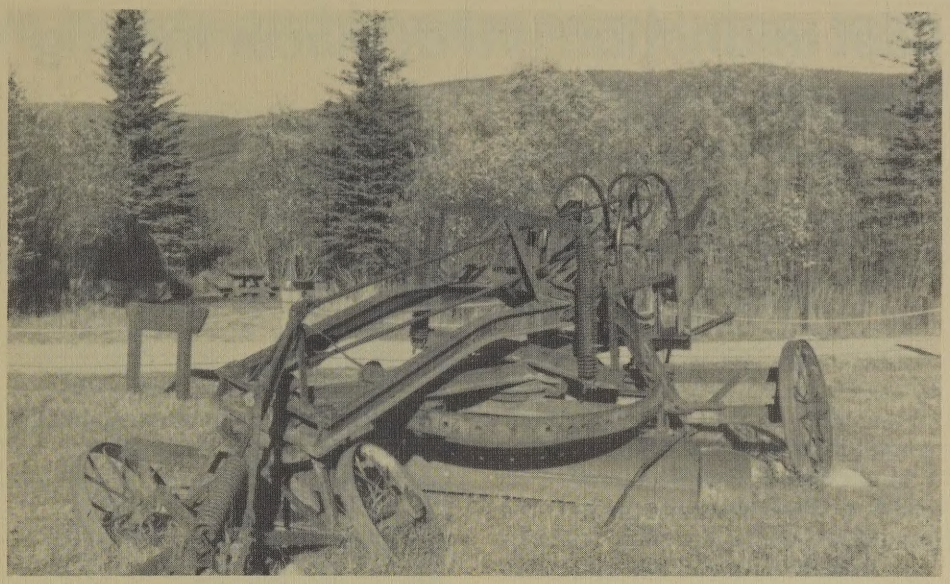
Fairbanks Exploration Company operated it from 1959 to 1965. In its peak years, an average run of the dredge (24 hours a day for two weeks) brought in about $40,000 in gold. Most of the claims are still being mined today.

During their trip the Browns camped at the only two developed campgrounds in the Fortymile country. Both are operated by the Bureau of Land Management, are free, and both accommodate motorhomes.

Walker Fork Campground at mile 82 of the Taylor Highway has 25 campsites. It is on the site of Lassen airstrip, which was used to deliver equipment and fuel to mining camps on Jack Wade Creek in the 1930s and 1940s. No trace remains of the original settlement where 200 people hand-mined claims in the 1900s.

The Browns camped two days at West Fork. A new picnic shelter there overlooks an oxbow lake. The Browns enjoyed walking through the campground in the evening, talking with other campers. One woman from California told them, "We saw a cow moose and and two calves standing in the lake early this morning, feeding. They seemed oblivious to all the people."

eek was installed in 1934 when gold was



An old road grader lends a sense of history to Walker Fork Campground on the Taylor Highway.

The West Fork campground is at mile 48.2, next to the Dennison Branch of the Fortymile River. It has seven pull-through campsites designed for large motorhomes and 18 sites for back-in camping. A hand-pumped well supplies drinking water at this campground.

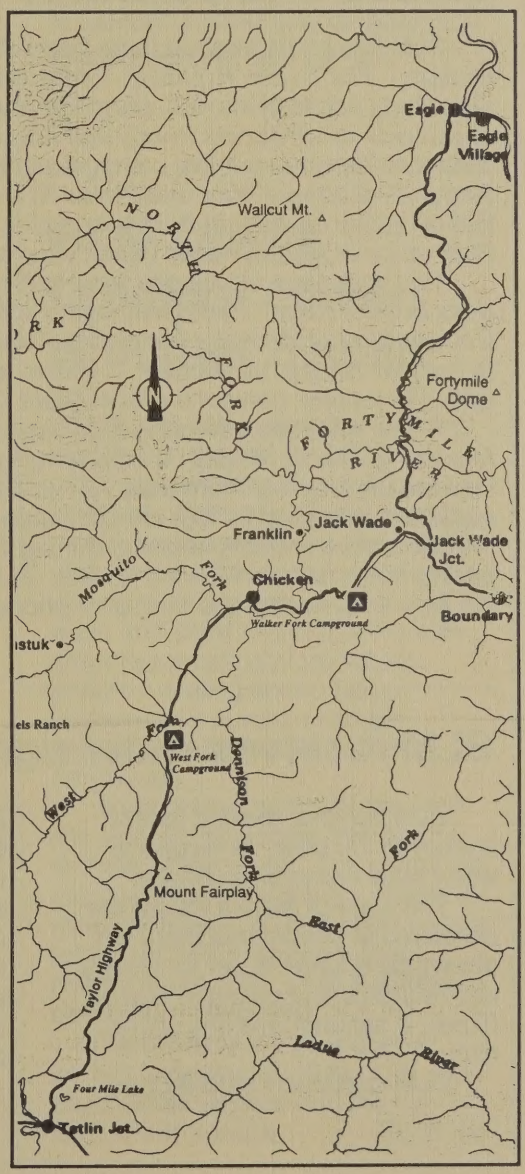
After they passed Chicken, the land got flatter. Black spruce and muskeg lined the road. The river water was brownish from the tannic acid being washed out of the soil by small streams and rainwater.

Ken's only real attempt at fishing was on their last evening in the Fortymile country, when they stopped at mile 4.9. From there they walked half a mile to Four Mile Lake, where Ken caught rainbow trout and grayling for a fresh fish dinner. They savored their last night in the Fortymile, sharing memories and vowing to read more about the area before they came back.

The next day they drove to Tetlin Junction, site of the historic Fortymile Roadhouse.

After stopping in for morning coffee and conversation, the Browns pulled out onto the Alaska Highway. It was another warm, sunny day as they headed northwest for Fairbanks.

—SDW



Last injunction lifted; placer mining okayed for Minto Flats

The last of four injunctions tying up placer mining on federal land in Interior Alaska since 1987 has now been dissolved by the U.S. District Court.

The court's action again signalled the high quality of four environmental impact statements prepared by the Bureau of Land Management. Miners are now free to resume their operations on federal land in the area under the guidelines established by the Bureau of Land Management.

On June 8, U.S. District Court Judge James A. von der Heydt dissolved the injunction halting placer mining in the Minto Flats drainage after the plaintiff Sierra Club et al. filed a motion of non-objection. The injunction stemmed from a suit brought by the Sierra Club and two other environmental groups challenging BLM's management of placer mining on federal lands on Birch Creek, Beaver Creek, the Fortymile River and the Minto Flats area, key placer mining drainages. The Minto Flats EIS specifically addressed cumulative impacts of mining on subsistence use in the area. —JGM

BLM publishes new recreation guides and scientific papers

BLM has just published three new brochures for tourists, boaters and floaters. *The Taylor Highway: Tetlin Junction to Boundary* is a road guide, describing points of interest along the route. *The Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River Access Points and Float Times* shows a recreation map with distances between put-ins, campground information and safety notes. *The Fortymile National Wild and Scenic River Rapids* provides detailed information on safely navigating the major rapids. For copies of these, contact any BLM office or Alaska Public Lands Information Center.

Two new open file reports have just been published: *Fisheries Investigations in the Beaver Creek Drainage, 1988,* by Louis Carufel; and *Bird Communities of Recently Burned and Unburned Forest and Scrub Habitats in Interior Alaska,* by Michael T. Hinkes and Kate Engels. For copies of the open file reports, contact the BLM State Office of Public Affairs.

A new scientific reference BLM has just published is *The Cumulative Impacts of Placer Mining: a bibliography of the 3809 EIS project,* edited by Howard Levine, lists more than 700 studies, textbooks, etc., for each of the resources analyzed in four impact statements BLM recently completed on the cumulative impacts of placer mining in central Alaska. For copies of the bibliography, contact Howard Levine, BLM State Office Public Room, 222 W. 7th Ave. #13, Anchorage 99513; or phone 271- 4403.

—JM

BLM reserves water rights on Beaver Creek

BLM became the first federal agency in the state to receive a water reservation on a stream.

The state of Alaska issued the certificate to ensure that there will always be enough water for fishing and recreational boating in Beaver Creek, a national wild and scenic river.

BLM specialists studied the instream water flow of Beaver Creek for two summers, determining the minimum amount of water needed to support fish, aquatic life, water quality, recreation, transportation, maintenance of the stream channel and banks and groundwater recharge. The state will review the data every 10 years.

—SDW

Campgrounds, boat launches set to go

BLM has installed a new boat ramp at Paxson Lake campground and is doubling the number of camp sites to 40 units, some of which are already ready.

Campers are reminded that all BLM camping areas are always filled to overflowing on Fourth of July holidays, particularly Sourdough and Tangle Lakes. Two alternative areas for those wishing to avoid the crowds are Seven Mile Lake and Tangle River. The Tangle Lakes campground will be closed July 10 to August 4 while BLM rebuilds the boat ramp. There is another boat launch and camping area nearby.

More information on BLM recreation opportunities can be obtained from any BLM office or from the Alaska Public Lands Information Centers in Anchorage, Fairbanks and Tok.

—EB

Three-way exchange includes Naval Arctic Research Lab

Capping off eight years of negotiations, BLM on June 1 completed the exchange of lands and properties between the Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation, the Department of Defense and the Interior Department.

According to Bureau of Land Management land resources chief Sue Wolf, "Ukpeagvik Inupiat is the first of any of the Arctic Slope corporations to receive their full entitlement under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. Through exchanges like this, the public interest is well served when all parties benefit."

The exchange was the final settlement of the corporation's land grant entitlement of almost 210,000 acres under the terms of the Act.

The exchange facilitated the consolidation of Interior Department lands in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska while providing the corporation 7,800 acres, including properties of the now-defunct Naval Arctic Research Lab in Barrow.

—RM

BLM volunteers give hearts and hands; win kudos, jobs

Senator Ted Stevens thanks BLM volunteer Diana Gansemer for her outstanding work as he reads the National 1989 Volunteer for Public Lands Award she received for establishing a federal visitor center in Coldfoot. Gansemer was one of just 17 people nationwide who received this prestigious award.

Last summer she lived in her camper at Coldfoot answering the questions of at least 700 visitors. In the evenings she presented a lecture and tour of historic mining cabins to more than 450 of these visitors. Gansemer gave more than 1,700 hours of labor to the Bureau.

"Volunteers like Diana Gansemer make a real difference in our efforts to manage public lands for future use and enjoyment," said Stevens.

Last winter, volunteer Diana Walter ran one of the busiest parts of BLM's Fairbanks offices, the mail room. In March she took a permanent federal job with the Internal Revenue Service, crediting BLM's volunteer program with helping her make it happen.

The belt was too big, but someone had brought a hole punch. Volunteer Randi Anderson put on the belt with the BLM buckle and smiled her pleasure. Her BLM co-workers had given her the belt and buckle for her work in correlating moose densities with fire occurrences in the Kobuk District. For five months she had devoted 15 hours a week to creating an overlay map of the district's fires for the past 50 years.

This summer instead of fighting fires, Anderson will work as a Cooperative Education student for the Kobuk District.

Diana Gansemer, who worked with such dedication as a volunteer at Coldfoot last summer, is returning this year as a paid BLM summer employee.

Sometimes the volunteer's reward is a heartfelt gesture of thanks from co-workers, sometimes it's a paying job, and sometimes it's nothing more than the satisfaction of making a contribution.

Most people figure on getting nothing tangible. But for whatever reason they do it , more and more people are choosing to do volunteer work for BLM.

BLM's volunteer program is still in its infancy. The program got its first volunteer in 1982. By1988, some 14,000 people donated work to the Bureau nationwide, an increase of 56percent over 1987. They contributed 583,351 hours of work worth more than $5.5 million. Since BLM spent less than $550,000 to administer their work, the benefit-cost ratio for the Bureau was 10 to 1. Sixty percent of the volunteers are 18 to 54 years of age; 30 percent are under 18. Eighty-five percent of them worked in land and renewable resources, in disciplines such as wildlife habitat management, archaeology, or recreation.

In Alaska, there were 219 volunteers last year, an 18 percent increase over 1987. They worked approximately 27,000 hours and saved the BLM $336,000, working mostly in recreation, fire, Cadastral survey, construction/maintenance and administrative services. Their jobs ranged from collecting litter to helping with archaeological research.

A 16-person volunteer fire crew received a National Public Lands Award last year for their exemplary work.

—SW, SM, DA, JM

BLM Opens Coldfoot center with new display

BLM is just putting the finishing touches on the interior of the log cabin visitor information station at Coldfoot. More than 6,000 people, mostly on bus tours, are expected to visit the area this summer. BLM is adding a wood stove, new interior walls and signs that will make it an attractive meeting place where people traveling on the Dalton Highway this summer can get recreation information from BLM employees.

New photographic displays tell the story of the people, plants and animals of the arctic. The center will also sell maps and have a variety of free pamphlets. Future plans call for additional items related to the history of the arctic to fill the display cases now being built.

The building is a cooperative project between the BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service —EB,SDW

frontier flashes

Five new members have been appointed to BLM's **Northern Alaska Advisory Council.** The Interior Department also approved a new seat, enlarging the council to 11 members. New members and their positions are: Ron Davis, Fairbanks, recreation; Rex Blazer, Fairbanks, environmental protection; Walter Sampson, Kotzebue, wildlife; Chris Birch, Fairbanks, transportation-rights-of-way; and Frank Geiger, Delta, elected official/general purpose government.

▽

Speakers from the Pacific Northwest, Korea, Japan and New Zealand came to Anchorage in May to discuss differences and similarities in **recreation programs in Pacific Rim countries.** BLM-Alaska was a cooperating agency working with the Alaska Recreation and Park Association to host the conference. BLM recreation planners made presentation on "linking opportunities with the national trails system" and the Iditarod National Historic Trail. BLM recreation program leader Terry O'Sullivan opened the wildlands recreation workshop.

BLM **State Director Mike Penfold** was **commencement speaker** at Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka.

Other BLM professionals also gave papers at the Alaska Anthropological Association's annual meeting in Anchorage. At this conference, anthropologist Bob King gave a paper on the Yukon Island National Historic Landmark, a prehistoric archaeological site; and historian Jim Ducker gave a paper, "Out of Harm's Way," on the Bureau of Education's effort to relocate Eskimoes living on the Seward Peninsula away from "corrupt" white communities in the early 1900s.

▽

For the second consecutive year, BLM's Alaska organization is the recipient of the Bureau's **National Safety Award.** Assistant Director for Management Support Tom Allen presented the award to State Director Mike Penfold in May.

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USE ☆ SHARE ☆ APPRECIATE

BLM's Anchorage District Office and the U.S. Army 6th Infantry Division (Light) signed an agreement June 7 allowing short-term military use of public lands in Alaska this summer. This is the first implementation of a law modifying the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 to allow use of public lands for military training on a short-term basis. The Army can now transport military troops over BLM-managed lands to training sites on state owned lands at Knik Glacier. Several agencies, including BLM, will monitor activities at the glacier to make sure environmental and operational stipulations are followed.

▽

The BLM Arctic District is opening its **farthest north field camp** this summer in Coldfoot. The 25-person camp will house resource specialists from all five BLM districts as they gather field data on recreation, wildlife, geology and cultural sites.

▽

The Alaska Division of Land and Water Management gave BLM employee Nelda Garrett their **Good Neighbor Award** for "exceptional service. . . providing accurate information necessary in our work." Garrett works in the Public Room in BLM's Fairbanks Support Center.

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